



MARIE-CLAIRE DIGBY
FOOD FILE

PASTRY PRINCESS

Iseult Janssens (22) is a Paris-trained pastry chef who has worked at Michelin-starred restaurants H el ene Darroze in the French capital and Restaurant Patrick Guillaud in Dublin, and is now running her own company, the Cake Stand, making gorgeous wedding cakes, desserts, cupcakes and macarons.

Janssens decided she wanted to be a pastry chef when she was still at school in Dublin, and in her final year at King's Hospital, she travelled to France to interview at three prestigious cookery schools –  cole Ritz Escoffier, Le Cordon Bleu and  cole Gr goire-Ferrandi.

She graduated with honours from  cole Gr goire-Ferrandi, and having completed a stage with Pierre Herm , she joined the pastry team at La Grande  picerie in Paris.

Her cakes are delicious, as well as beautiful, and are made with organic ingredients where possible. The French-style macarons are particularly eye-catching, and can be ordered from thecakestand.ie at  12 for a box of 14 (excluding delivery, which is available in the Dublin/Kildare region), or  14.95 at branches of Avoca, the Sugar Cafe in Cork and the Country Basket in Limerick. Flavours include chocolate,



salted butter caramel, pistachio, rose, blackcurrant and violet, and cranberry and orange. Special occasion cakes, serving approximately 15, cost from  40- 60.

Janssens will be doing tasting sessions at Avoca in Rathcoole, Co Dublin today (1pm-4pm), and in Avoca on Suffolk Street, Dublin 2 next Saturday (1pm-4pm).

FRENCH CONFECTION



Isabelle Sheridan is a French woman who has been living in Ireland for 20 years, and who brought with her from her family home in the Loire Valley a tradition and knowledge of making charcuterie. "Every region in France has its own unique variety," she says. "My family have their own recipes for p t s and terrines."

Using her family recipes Sheridan set up a stall in the English Market in Cork, selling Irish and French cured meats, p t s, foie gras and sausages. On the Pig's Back recently expanded, opening a new production facility and cafe in the former St Patrick's Woollen Mills in Douglas, Cork, and the company now employs 15 people between the two outlets.

ON THE PIG'S BACK Isabelle Sheridan (centre) with Lord Mayor of Cork Cllr Dara Murphy (left), and the French ambassador to Ireland, Yvon Ro  D'Albort

WHAT'S IN YOUR BASKET

Mossfield Organic Farm, where the Haslam family have been making their distinctive Gouda-style cheese since 2004, benefits from its limestone pastures, which support a huge variety of natural herbs that in turn give its milk products their unique taste.

Margaret O'Farrell, from Nenagh, Co Tipperary, who admits she has a slight vested interest – she does some administrative work for the farm's owners – is a big fan of the cheese, which she says she buys from the Organic Store in Birr run by Jonathan Haslam (right).

"It is absolutely delicious just served simply as a cheese lunch or supper with maybe some homemade bread, chutneys and pickles. My favourite midweek, vegetarian dinner option is chilli eggs with an Irish twist.

"Fry up a sliced onion and half a green and a

red pepper. Add some cumin and oregano, and a tin of chopped tomatoes and simmer for a bit. Break four eggs on top and grate some Mossfield cheese (preferably the cumin-flavoured) over the top. Simmer for 10-15 minutes and you have a yummy dinner for two."

Mossfield comes in plain, mature, basil and garlic, Mediterranean, and cumin varieties. See mossfield.ie for a list of suppliers nationwide. What's in your basket? E-mail us at mcdigby@irishtimes.com



HUGO ARNOLD
MONITOR



Bread circles

Itsa restaurants no longer import their bagels but have them baked by McCloskey's Bakery in Drogheda

BAGELS MAY LOOK like mere rolls with a hole, but they are steeped in history. And you have to get them right – there are an increasing number of imposters on the market. Just ask my colleague Domini Kemp. Her company Itsabagel imports around one million of the things per year; she has chewed her way through a fair few.

The history of the bagel goes back to 1683 in Poland and King Jan Sobieski's victory over the Ottoman Turks – when *beugel* meant stirrup – to the flight of Polish Jews to the US. But bagel history may go back even further, to the latter half of the 16th century. There is evidence that the bagel came into being in Poland in competition to the *buslik*, a lean, wheat loaf. The *buslik* caused a problem for strict observers of the Sabbath in that it took too long to bake – a proper bagel proves for more than 12 hours and is then boiled and baked, meaning it can be on the table with cream cheese and smoked salmon in well under an hour, post-Sabbath fasting.

The 12-hour bit is tricky. Time is money and Itsa imported bagels because they were unable to find a product in Ireland they considered more than a roll with a hole. Shortcuts include flour with too low a protein content, and skipping the boiling, crucial in caramelising the sugars and giving the golden crust.

That was, until Patrick McCloskey turned up. I am standing in McCloskey & Sons bakery in Drogheda, Co Louth, talking bagels. I'd like to say making them, but actually Marta Ciesielska is placing each one, by hand, into boiling water. These have been proving for 18 hours and when they come out of their bath, after a minute or so, they are sprinkled with seeds before being manhandled onto trays and into the stone-floored oven. It is nine decks high, about 10 metres tall and has a computerised hoist to get the breads in at the right time. The flour used is high in protein, 14 per cent (strong bread flour is around 12 per cent), and it is this, combined with the proving time, that gives the bagels their chewability.

Roark Cassidy, Itsa's director of operations, is frowning as some earlier bagels come sliding out of the oven. He is not too happy about the onion portion control – stickability seems to be the issue – so they ponder the problem, and he explains what really makes a bagel a bagel.

Cassidy is clear. The right ingredients, handled in the right way, produce a bagel that is "satisfying, dense and more filling than straight bread". As he says, one bagel really is enough.

In purist taste mode, I try poppy, sesame, onion and plain versions. Then, at home, I have what Itsa calls "an all-day cure", made by my son for lunch the next day. Bacon, sausage, egg, some ketchup and a plain bagel. Boy, is it good.

For the next few weeks, you can judge for yourself. The freezers at Itsa restaurants currently stock the last of the New York bagels, while if you order one at the counter it will have been freshly baked in Drogheda at McCloskey's Bakery.

This change in production is one of the real bonus points. Bread freezes well, but there is a difference. Irish production of Itsa bagels will mean your bagel will be fresh, rather than transported frozen.

The change also means Irish jobs, local distribution, fewer food miles and, perhaps most importantly, a world-class food product.

Ironically, exports are on the horizon – maybe even to the US.

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